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Section III: Regional Issues

JAMES CARON

Reading the Power of Printed Orality in Afghanistan: Popular Pashto Literature as Historical Evidence and Public Intervention

I. Introduction

A. *Literature and Evidence*

Access to popular Pashto literature grants the historian a good amount of material with which to write the social history of Afghanistan in the early twentieth century, a period for which we do not have many sources on rural society in particular. In contrast to the heavily bureaucratized colonial regimes to the north and the south of Afghanistan, even twentieth century Afghan sources are far sparser in their information on populations in rural areas, on rural elites and especially non-elites. Up to the 1960s or 1970s, what we primarily have are haphazard colonial British intelligence reports, an occasional article from economy-oriented periodicals, and the odd cache of the Afghan regime's own local court records.¹

Of course, this situation is not unique to Afghanistan's history. The primary question for this essay is how we might engage oral and other popular literature as an alternative source of social narrative; and how we might read these sources in as many dimensions as possible, in order to write social history of rural non-elites in particular. This essay uses the restricted example of Pashto sources to explore larger methodological points that should hold equally well for other Islamicate societies that transmitted and recirculated poetry in similar ways. But also, some of these points speak to the use of folk or popular evidence in history writing more generally, to bring out new social perspectives in regions and periods for which there is not a shortage of other sources. Especially when dealing with older periods, for which most available popular literature has been collated and recirculated multiple times already, what are some ways to treat decontextualized (or recontextualized) texts in such a way that the mediation of their transmission becomes a potential asset to the historian rather than an unwelcome intrusion?

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Here, I find that reading popular literature in the way that its collators did, in the creation of their anthologies, opens up interesting possibilities. Another related question: how can one read the overall cultural history of emergent genres, both popular and elite, as itself a form of evidence for social history writing?

B. Society in the Mirror of Non-elite Political Science

To start at the beginning, though, we might ask a basic question: how much can we learn from this (originally) oral poetry that we don't already know from other sources? Sometimes it can completely reorient our perspectives. My interest in literature was sparked by reading poems by a major documentarian of social inequality and power in rural Afghanistan of the late 1940s and 1950s, a non-literate casual laborer and poet from the social margins of the Jalalabad region nicknamed Malang Jan. In contrast to commonplace historical views of the monarchic period under the king Zahir Shah as a generally sleepy, uneventful one characterized by consensus, Malang Jan spoke of rural society on the edge of collapse. Malang Jan's voice also exploded any lingering stereotypes about egalitarian ideologies in 'tribal' Pashtun society that I might have harbored; and prompted me to pursue questions about rural Pashtun life that I rarely heard vocalized: how did the rural poor in this heavily populated, agrarian region view their social position and scope for social agency? What demands did they make of people more powerful than them?

Reading ethnographic literature related to Pashtuns, of which there has been a great deal since the 1950s, one might be forgiven for assuming that horizontal forms of collective awareness (like 'mass' or 'nation') were undermined by the predominance of lineage and caste solidarities—that is, something often described as 'tribe'. A poem by Malang Jan called "*Nən me bya zargəy nare nare khugegi* [Today my heart sharply aches again]", among many others, gives the empirical lie to that assumption, at least regarding the dense agrarian population of the Eastern Province (*Samt-i Mashriqi*).² This work—of which excerpts follow – reads rather like poetic political science, complete with a thesis statement and supporting arguments fleshed out in subsequent stanzas. In it, Malang Jan does not speak of much that reflects a 'tribal' vision on rural society. Rather, he often speaks of the indignities of life faced by the landless lower classes of the rural eastern province, classes which swelled since the early twentieth century after successive political-economic events truncated earlier routes of labor migration and trade for the less-powerful, and the monarchy consolidated its power through patrimonial networks.

Though extensive and systematic details are rare, some sources indirectly or directly suggest that rural economy in the east shifted far more toward local subsistence and rootedness in the land and its political structures than previously; and wealth and land were increasingly concentrated upwards.³ The state taxed land mostly indirectly, through its support to urban credit monopolies, run by favored individuals. Meanwhile rural poor who might have held onto small holdings in earlier periods were more and more forced into sharecropping, and itinerant local casual labor in nuclear family groups or smaller.⁴ These dynamics cut across tribe, and rapacious acquisitive behavior was not uncommon within families. Malang Jan's own biography provides a poignant concrete example of

these dynamics. Losing his already modest land inheritance at an early age to his uncles and cousins, he labored in numerous unstable and low-paying casual work arrangements until his patronage at Pashtunistan Radio shortly before his death.⁵

Though he rarely attempted a discussion of how the political-economic situation evolved historically, Malang Jan did not shy away from real-time systematic analysis of it. He directly attempted to address how local agrarian politics intersected with global political economy. In some of his works including the one introduced above, we see a view of interregional trade and mobility as something which small people cannot participate in except as passive, dependent consumers of much-needed commodities, and through burdensome credit monopolies:⁶

95 percent of us are illiterate
 We have to travel three villages over just to find a corrupt accountant/tax man [...]
 Our tender youth fail in droves
 And invoking this failure they abandon school
 In truth, they have no such thing as *pashto* [i.e. ethnicized ethical code] or honor
 The fathers of these failures lack resolve
 If a Pashtun son fails, it's nothing short of death
 Today once more my heart aches, thin and sharp [...]
 We can't produce a single learned person in the Pashtun nation
 Once again I see pain in the mirror of my thoughts
 Today if a new blade comes in from outside
 We somehow get the desire to buy it
 Not a desire to make it for ourselves, by ourselves
 That we should fill our bellies by the fruits of our own labor
 We sell our cotton and wool to the rest of the world
 It sells for 2 or 3 [Afghanis, the currency unit] per bushel
 Then we buy back the cloth for 100 or 90 a yard
 And nobody in the bazaar can fight with the shopkeeper over that
 The money we spend on tea and cigarettes
 Our year's earnings go to foreign countries in one minute
 Due to my failure I am mixed up in shouting and crying
 If only this world's bazaar didn't mix things up so!⁷

Throughout this poem, there is a cumulative argument that a lack of rural education and the resulting domination of the rural poor, as well as a national non-competitiveness in global political economy, are caused by specific local power relations. Malang Jan sees the global 'rise of the West' as, in part, being merely relative. The disparity between nations is, for him, related to the local 'rise of the rich (and powerful)', which reinforces dependency of rural Pashtuns:⁸

If you look out onto this world
 Just look at their drive, their self-respect, their spiritual motivation
 They imagine inhabiting the moon
 Living above the land, in the air
 We still just wallow in the dirt
 We can't escape the profiteering of exploiters⁹

Still, concerned as he is with a primarily subaltern rural audience, Malang Jan understandably gives the most local dimensions of power relations the most

evocative, and emotionally charged, metaphorical treatment. In these sections we strongly see an elaboration of local subaltern dependence on the patronage of rural landed elites—*khans* and *maliks* [lineage ‘elders’; and landowners and administrative officials, usually all at once]—who are themselves tied to the monarchy in webs of influence. We see a portrayal of rural power, reaching in macrocosm all the way up to the monarchy, as ‘patriarchy’ in a sense akin to Julia Adams’ literalist use of the word: ‘rule of the father’ (or father-like figure).¹⁰ If, as in the above quote, it is the “fathers” of the “failing sons” who are really at fault for these failures, this metaphor also stands, in other sections of this poem, for family patriarchs; local elites; and for the ‘father of the nation’ all on various levels of macrocosm. Furthermore, these elites exercise socio-economic power in both the beneficent and the disciplinary aspects of paternalist *khan* power: munificent redistribution of resources; socially humiliating physical punishments. Or at least they are supposed to; Malang Jan’s critique of bad governance rests on his assertion that *khans*, *maliks*, and the royal family’s local representatives exercise the full repertoire of paternalistic disciplinary power without fulfilling any of their social responsibilities as leaders. Instead, a rapacious exercise of asymmetrical power is visible in Malang Jan’s representation, again couched in highly intimate imagery:

When our leaders carry on like this
 What other complaints should the mass give?
 A fire has lit itself in my lungs due to this sorrow
 Once again I’ve found pain in the mirror of my thoughts [...]
 My *khans* and *maliks* only care about the bribes I pay them
 My *Shaykh Sahib* [living saint; head of a devotional hierarchy] tells me to raise an
 apocalypse
 I’ve never seen a true servant among them
 If only this world’s bazaar didn’t mix things up so! [...]
 There are certain *khans* among our Pashtuns
 Who pine after young boys day and night
 Occasionally they do it at gunpoint
 They all belittle themselves alone!
 What could the pleasure of *khan*-hood be for them
 That they should be caught up in the love of a young boy?
 When I look at this practice and these matters
 What hope do I have for the relations between rich and poor?
 Well, whatever their fate may be, they’ll arrive at it
 Today once more my heart aches, thin and sharp [...]
 So now, what should I say about certain governing officials?
 It’s OK, I’m not upset, I consent to them
 Because I’m all torn up by their green willow switches
 Dear God, am I a human or an animal?¹¹

II. Elite Preservation of Poetry; Views of Poetry and Society

Popular poetry such as the example presented above gives us more to work with. It should also be clear that it provides a very different sort of knowledge than do our other sources on the period. But how should we engage this body of narration?

In approaching this question of methods, we should begin with the proviso that popular poetry in this Pashtun setting may be a fruitful archive of alternative discourse, but 'alternative' should not be equated with 'autonomous'. Nearly all the preserved output we have of these rural amateur intellectuals like Malang Jan, particularly from the early to mid-twentieth century period in question here, has been preserved through its transcription by more traditionally professional or academic intellectuals. I approach the topic of these academics (along with non-elite intellectuals) as social activists, and some ways that their activities influenced the very marginal poetry they interacted with, toward the end of this essay. In this next section, I first focus narrowly on the intellectual exercise through which the majority of this popular poetry was preserved, and then move on to introduce some problems related to reading popular Pashto poetry as historical source material.

A. *To What Extent is the Subaltern Speaking?: A Note on Tazkira Historiography*

If we can only obtain representations of non-elite speech and action filtered through more elite sources, "can the subaltern" in fact "speak" at all? By reproducing Gayatri Spivak's question, I intend to highlight the importance of carefully drawing out how oral poetry from the 1940s and 1950s reaches us today.¹² The majority of this literature has been preserved for the historian in a series of what are called *tazkiras*, or biographical directories; and the odd independent poetic collection of non-elite poets like Malang Jan can often be seen as an extremely extended *tazkira* entry. They might take any given demographic as their topic: as narrow as *Notables of Kandahar: Sufis, Gnostics, and Saints*, or as broad as *Famous Influential People of Afghanistan* (in practice, members of the royal family or state functionaries).¹³ Further, they are among the most common genres of social representation throughout Islamicate history; and one of the most common subjects for *tazkiras* in modern Afghan history has been "poets".

Like all *tazkiras*, an entry in a *tazkira* about poets includes a biographical sketch of the individual. Poet *tazkiras* also usually contain several examples of the poet's work, generally but not always decontextualized in terms of its exact point of performance. Regarding the non-elite poetry at issue in this essay, often times it, and the poet's biography, were initially obtained through a transcriber's firsthand experience in local communities. Individual articles resembling a typical *tazkira* entry would then be printed in Afghanistan's relatively few cultural studies periodicals such as *Da Kabul Mujalla*; and these would often reappear, verbatim, in edited *tazkiras* sometime in the future. In the case of individuals who were still alive, in certain *tazkiras* the compiler(s) solicited self-narratives from the subjects; edited them only for standardized spelling; and printed them in the *tazkira* complete with their address to the editor intact.¹⁴ Where most marginal rural poets were concerned, authors and editors did not usually go to this extreme in making it appear that the entry-subject's voice was unmediated; but a positive value on minimal mediation is worth noting as a mid-twentieth century ideal of Pashto *tazkira* historiography.

There are many aspects of *tazkiras* which are of interest, but primary has been their status as the dominant genre of historiography in much of twentieth century Afghanistan. Where might this hegemonic status of the *tazkira* stem from? In part, state hegemony under the monarchic system was built upon a

narrative of the unbridled self-sovereignty and self-sufficiency of the individual patriarchal man, as an ethnic ideal for Pashtuns built into the 'code' of *Pashunwali* [literally, 'Pashtunness']. Power in Pashtun regions of Afghanistan, up until the 1960s or so, often looked much more like 'layered,' rather than absolute, sovereignty, with the monarchy primarily relying on local powerful men, rather than bureaucracy, to project its rule out onto the hinterland's lower levels.¹⁵ *Tazkira* historiography clearly emphasizes the narrative subjectivity of individuals' lives (and poetic voices) as opposed to a depersonalized central subject like 'society' or 'the nation'. Might not its dominance as a form of social narration relate to the monarchic state's mode of exercising power through individualized, embodied intermediaries?¹⁶ Many or most of these *tazkiras* were published by state presses, which were punished on the very rare occasions that they attempted to print anything like critical social history as conventionally understood by US academics.¹⁷ Individual genealogy was acceptable to monarchic authorities, but systemic analysis that sought to place these powerful individuals in a larger structure of monarchic political economy was not.

From a different direction, though, there is also room to claim that *tazkira* writing, and biographically-contextualized poetic discourse more generally, was a genre that some intellectuals saw as potentially reformist and liberating. Twentieth century Pashto *tazkiras* about poets usually present a cross-class section of rural society, and thus also present a variety of voices in poetry, if not always in the poets' self-narratives. This potentially might provide a back door through which certain activist academics could seek to introduce subaltern voices into elite, literate circulation, as well as to attempt a particular form of social history, drawing systemic analysis through juxtaposition of enough varied individuals. Certainly, this would depend on the choice of individuals to include. But of all the influential *tazkiras* published in and about Pashto, the majority of those that included the voices of non-elites were published by the *Da Paxto Tolma*. This was a governmental body staffed overwhelmingly by liberalist intellectuals who favored egalitarian social reform in a framework of constitutional monarchy; and in some cases, of outright abolition of the monarchy.¹⁸

Would it not be a highly political act to use real people's voices to point out contradictions in hegemonic discourses? Through that route, one could easily belie elite masculine claims about self-sovereign egalitarianism as a characteristic of *all* Pashtuns. Hegemonic claims about Pashtun society that reflected a *khan's* (or aristocrat's) view of himself in the world become exposed as normative, rather than absolutely true, when those claims are juxtaposed with the biographies and voices of actually-existing clients, members of dependent castes and lineages, or women. *Their* poetic mirror of society reflects mostly dependency and powerlessness, not masculine self-sufficient honor and competition except as an unattainable ideal of ambiguous moral value.

B. Against Reading Poetry Only as a Mirror for Social Life

Nancy Dupree characterizes the primary elite Pashto literary trend of the mid 1940s through the early 1960s, among these same reformist authors who produced *tazkiras*, as being on the cusp of two eras: "sentimental socialism" and "scientific socialism".¹⁹ There was a noticeable romanticizing of the rural poor in their work, but in general the dominant trend in elite Pashto literature of the

1940s and 1950s was a movement toward realistic portrayals of rural life, in attempts to arouse elite activist sentiment within the relatively small sphere of prose circulation at the time. The prolific *tazkira* editor and literary writer 'Abd al-Ra'uf Benawa complained, in 1951:

Those who are used to sitting in a walnut chair and looking at the world through the windows of their cars, have no idea who 'the people' are ... if they came to know the people better, they would see that ordinary people walk bare-footed because of their poverty. They don't even know that there is not a single person out of a hundred who is satisfied with his conditions.²⁰

Meanwhile, reformist authors such as Benawa and Gul Pacha Ulfat pioneered the Afghan Pashto short story through their portrayals of the rural poor, especially of women who were doubly marginalized.

But, beyond its role in 1940s and 1950s activism, a co-option of marginal, rural intellectual production as transparent representation was part of a longer and more hegemonic tradition in local folklore studies. In 1935, the Prime Minister Hashim Khan gave the reason for a state decree that civil servants must learn the Pashto language: "Our legends and poems will be understood by everyone. We shall draw from them a pride in our culture of the past which will unite us."²¹ Among the earliest published collections of Pashto narrative verse was the 1939 *Milli Hindara*, or "*Mirror of the Nation*". Sanitized and transformed into prose by the editor, M. G. Nuri, the emphasis was on the stories in their role as a reflection of the Pashtun national spirit. Two other volumes followed, and continue in print up to present.²² And a number of subsequent works continued this interpretive tradition with explicit reference to history writing, such as A. H. Habibi's watershed annotations to the (highly controversial) *tazkira* manuscript he claimed to have found in an old village mosque: the *Pata Khazana*, which claims to reproduce Pashto poems and biographical sketches from the eighth century straight down through the eighteenth.²³

Similar trends in foreign scholarship reinforced local interpretations of Pashto poetry as mirror-reflection of society. James Darmesteter's monumental 1888 work *Chants populaires des Afghans*, which includes copious amounts of Pashto poetry as well as linguistic notes, treats Pashto poetry in exactly this capacity as documentary evidence for Afghan social conditions and something like 'national character'. A century later, and all through the intervening time, Darmesteter's work had remained hugely influential in Afghanistan for this very reason, since it reproduced full Pashto poems of the nineteenth century. Studying local perspectives on older anti-imperial wars bolstered, for Kabul's elites, an image of indigenous pride, of reclaiming the nation's ability to tell its own history. Asad Allah Sho'ur's 1988 Persian study on *Oral Communications and their Historical Trajectory in Afghanistan* reproduces and critically contrasts a number of these poems, in its analysis of how Pashto poetry served as a mass medium of communication.²⁴ Although Sho'ur mentions "functions" of poetry beyond the "informational", functions like "enjoyment" and "mobilization to action", Sho'ur restricts his discussion to textual aspects and does not extend his analysis to concrete circulation, or even relations of power except those between "Afghans" and "the British". Again, the image is one whereby a transparent

presentation of facts is the salient feature of Pashto poetry, with other “functions” building on this primary quality.

There is much to be said for the claim that Pashto poetry gives us a wider range of material to work with than traditional historical archives do. This claim, however, is not necessarily based on the practice of reading Pashto poetry exclusively in a positivistic way, as factual or informative representation. Using what might be provisionally called subaltern Pashto poetry as an archive of transparent documents for social history proves problematic.

For one, there are methodological issues most recently raised by David Curley in the introductory essay to his *Poetry and History*, a collection of essays on early modern history that rely on semi-ritual Bengali *mangal-kabya* narrative poems as primary source material.²⁵ While there are many valuable social details in these oral narratives, Curley argues, literary texts cannot be used solely as transparent documents of society without taking into account how these texts participated in social contexts. The focus should not be on poetry as decontextualized snapshot, but on poetry as intellectual intervention—responding to social narratives, and making countering interventions.

Like the opposing idea of poetry as mirror, a conception of non-elite poetry as public intervention was not an idea foreign to Afghan commentators at the time. For many elite activist scholars such as Qiyam al-Din Khadim, who helped spark a major grassroots cultural movement in rural eastern Afghanistan in the late 1940s, it appears that any mimetic characteristics of poetry existed in a dialectic with the reformist potential of poetry. For Khadim, poetry manifested and transmitted a preexisting Platonic emotional state from one person to another in the medium of organized language; but it also had the capability to transform individuals’ consciousness and society for this very reason. And furthermore, it was crucial for the reformist poet to be attuned to the social context of the poetry; and especially to the audience it was aimed at.²⁶

At least to some extent, we are still concerned with what the subaltern is saying, no matter how much filter it comes through. But, for the present-day American historian as much as for the earlier Afghan activist, this is best tied not to what we can call the ‘indicative’ scope of poetry, but to the ‘subjunctive’; which is moreover tied to the logic of trying to recover the active context of the poems which have been preserved.

In the poem presented above, and in ‘political science’ poems that rose so quickly as a genre in the 1940s and 1950s, this subjunctivity is even more explicit than in the narratives that Curley studies (or Darmesteter and Sho‘ur too, for that matter). Such poems leave little doubt that they were designed for persuasion, with description being secondary. Indeed, the 1950s was an era of much rural cultural activism; and one wherein urban and rural activism began cross-fertilizing. Malang Jan’s social sphere eventually collided with that of the reformist literary and social philosopher Khadim, who argued persuasively for poetry as socially transformative.

Poetry being viewed as a medium of persuasion is not a new analytical direction in current Afghan studies. In an important article, David Edwards makes the point that Pashto poetry of the 1980s war period was a political weapon; though for empirical reasons that he makes clear, he does not fully flesh out ways that social action, ideology and circulation might be linked.²⁷ As a result, that discussion often leans toward an analysis that oral poetry reflected

and argued in favor of conservative tribal values, in an unchanging rural population that was busy facing down a dynamic state. There is a jarring contradiction between the claim that poetic production and circulation was an agentive act, and a tacit conception of rural areas as primarily reactive, not proactive.

The point that formal oral poetry might be organic with, not an impediment to, proactive political organization and social change in rural areas has been made in historical and anthropological studies of Africa and the Middle East, in a relatively more sustained fashion than in the Central and South Asianist literature.²⁸ One might cite the work of Steven Caton, who argues that highland Yemeni poetry has been crucial in negotiating 'tribal' life; and more, that its key role in mediation adds a necessary discursive element to the study of Yemeni rural politics. For Caton, this undermines what he sees as the overly static, and overly crude, "segmentary model" of society—a model which has generally been applied indiscriminately to Pashtun societies as well.²⁹

Said Samatar's account of the rise of Sayyid Abdille Hasan in Somalia is structured around poetry both as evidence and as historical subject in its own right. Samatar's account is yet more interesting for many reasons – especially in the way that poetry's horizontal publicness enabled a political actor to transcend local ties.³⁰ Building on this insight, and on some of the important work by W. Flagg Miller (also working on Yemeni poetry), I argue that reading poetry to infer conditions of public circulation, especially the geographic and political reach of the poet's community of addressees, is also important.³¹ I discuss this last aspect at greater length in the final section of this paper. In the remainder of the current section, I return to methodological issues surrounding rural popular poetry as archive.

C. Political Science is Obvious, But What of Love Lyrics?

Besides the methodological issues raised by poetic 'political science,' there is an empirical issue. Although there are important exceptions, examples of two genres – poetic political science and local narratives – have enjoyed an overwhelming proportion of attention as historical source material, both in Afghan and western scholarship, and even in studies of similar oral poetry traditions in Africa and the Middle East.³² But these genres, while very evocative, actually seem to have been fairly restricted in the work of marginal rural Pashtun poets, in comparison to a vast body of lyric poetry of a somewhat familiar Persianate type focusing on 'lover and beloved'. The aforementioned scholar Khadim, who directly worked with rural oral poets and musicians in the 1940s-1950s in attempts to create a critical social consciousness among the rural poor of Malang Jan's region, remarked on this quite pointedly in 1954: "are we [i.e. reformist scholars like Khadim himself, who often worked in didactic poetry genres] outside society, or part of it?" Why did many poets from "oppressed" classes, he asked, so resolutely remain "trapped in the snare of black tresses [a popular romantic trope]" even while poetry had the potential to be politically liberating, to "break the people's solid chains of iron"?³³

Most of Malang Jan's early poems took this lyric shape (although his and many other subaltern poets' lyrics tend to express much more alienation – less often playful, and less fine-nuanced even in grief—than comparable Pashto or Persian poetry by 'cultivated' poets). The political science genres came later.

The transformation in genre came as a direct result of changing construals of 'the' rural public that they addressed, construals which subaltern poets had a major, though not exclusive, role in shaping. I address that change presently. For now, let us remain on the subject of lyric poetry.

Clearly, any attempt to read subaltern poetry as a source for social history must take into account the vast majority of rural poetry; and we are fortunate that copious amounts of rural lyric poetry have been preserved in *tazkiras*. The literary scholar 'Abd Allah Bakhtanai 'Khidmatgar' provides a methodological insight of how one might read subaltern lyric poetry with the sensibility of a social historian (and how some reformist critics *did* read it). Highlighting the way that Malang Jan's "folkloric tropes of love" display the same poetics of indignant powerlessness as the ones which he would address to the Pashtun nation later in his career, Khidmatgar says that these sorts of lyrics display a preoccupation with:

unsuccessful love between a fictitious Layla and Majnun; the beloved's indifference or cruelty; the "dog-hood" of the rival; [and] themes like separation, fire, thorns, pain, and ultimately failure [as the] symbolic folkloric form of the songs. In reality this is an expression of the pain, worries, and hardships of eastern peoples [*ulāsumā*], through the vehicle of the poet's ostensibly individual pain dressed in the garb of tropic wordplay [*khiyal*] and mysticism [*tasawwuf*]; and it expresses a long-term historical strangulation.³⁴

Begging the indifferent beloved in Pashto oral lyrics can simultaneously be read, Khidmatgar argues, as the address of a *malang*, or obsessive devotee to God, begging the deity for a deeper spiritual connection; and also, as a social critique from the margins. An early lyric poem by Malang Jan, "*Tə da naz pa khob wida we, ma zharəl* [You slept in a carefree, self-absorbed sleep; I cried]", posits this as a class relationship: an abject person addressing an upper-class beloved who has never wanted for anything in life, and is therefore indifferent to the lifelong deprivations experienced by the rural poor devotee:

You slept in a carefree, self-absorbed sleep; I cried
 You were without worry, comfortable and content; I cried
 Your face rivaled the full moon itself
 You'd already had experience of it; I cried
 I begged you for one single kiss
 It looked like that bothered you; I cried
 The dry pillow became wet from my tears
 You were doted on in your upbringing; I cried
 This is my, Malang Jan's, lot in life: to be withered by heat
 You were laughing and playful; I cried.³⁵

Is this a poem about the indifference of a beloved; or is it a gentle rebuke aimed at community leaders—*khans* and *maliks*—failing to fulfill their obligations as patrons of redistribution (a common enough social critique that Jon Anderson also described in the southeastern Pashtun setting)?³⁶ Khidmatgar, who knew Malang Jan as well as anyone did, would argue that both readings are valid, and reinforce each other.³⁷ Other rural poets played within this specific metaphorical world of class relations as passion. Muhammad Na'im, discussed at greater length below, asks his object of obsession for her love explicitly as "*qalang*"—a

reward; the honor and favor and redistributed wealth bestowed by a patron onto a client generally, and a skilled subaltern poet in particular.³⁸

Of course, there is only so far that this sort of argument can be taken, in the absence of other information. Luckily, a good deal of the popular poetry we have also contains some social information preserved alongside it in *tazkira* biography. The following section continues a discussion of interpretive strategies for love lyrics as above, but combining poetry and our other useful source, biography. In that section, I attempt to practically demonstrate some of the contextualized reading strategies that I have been advocating in theory. In particular, I take a cue from the possibilities of the *tazkira* genre, highlighting social contradiction through reading multiple entries that are formally similar, as opposed to the use of poetry in isolated texts as a snapshot of a static system. That is, rather than viewing the intermediary steps of transmission as distorting the 'primary' source, I intend to show how the intermediary step of *tazkira* compilation can help elucidate issues for the historian. Also, noting the dialectics between poet-persona and actual biographical individual highlights ways that powerless people postured their speech as effective political "weapons of the weak", to use the phrase coined by James Scott.³⁹ This sort of reading strategy is best demonstrated in action, as it were—good reason for a potentially indulgent detour into the world of love lyrics. In particular, I read the trope of *malangi*, austere yet obsessive devotion, as a site of social strategy in poetry. This detailed introduction of critique in rural lyric poetry also serves as a basis of comparison for the subsequent discussion on genre changes, and the importance of emergent genres and new ways of representing conflict as historical evidence of wider social change. The sections that follow begin with lyrics, and gradually add in social context.

III. Lyric Poetry in Multiple Contexts

A. Text and Persona: The Trope of *Malangi* (Obsessive Devotion) as Political

As anthropologists such as Jon Anderson, writing in a more structuralist vein, have described, obsessive devotional love (*'ishq*) can often articulate a parallel moral narrative of masculinity against elite landed masculine propriety that was solidified around *namus*, or honor derived from a man's protective sovereignty over that which society considered to be his (women and children; also property).⁴⁰ This countervailing value-system was often explored by local elite poets for the sake of transgressive literary pleasure. Here we could take the example of a 1940s poet named Muhammad Na'im, of Shewa, Lower Kunar District, Nangrahar. Na'im was the *malik* of an entire *'alaqa*—that is, the headman and major property owner of an administrative division incorporating dozens of villages. He was also a well-known sportsman, artist, athlete, and gentleman *bon vivant*.⁴¹

In one preserved example of his poetry, he takes the persona of an ardent lover pursuing a young bride, persuading her to throw her husband's honor to the wind and join him on his bed. The following poem echoes a popular wedding song, "Step slowly, Layla". Its lyrics invert the controlled sexuality of marriage, particularly the masculine propriety of *namus*, as symbolized by the phrase "place a green tattoo spot" [symbolizing sensual beauty in Pashto poetry]

“above your *abru*” [‘brow’, but also glossed as ‘honor’ and ‘propriety’ in most Persian-influenced languages]:

Come, O Groom; Layla-bride, place a red nose-ring pendant over your red lips; Step slowly
 Put yourself together, place a small green tattoo-spot above your *abru*; Step slowly
 I am coming to spend time with you – I will tie up the *mozi* [contemptible man] on the road
 Go down to the *ziyarat* [shrine]; place your hennaed hands in the milk; Step slowly
 [...]

 I am your lover, Layla – Look, I am coming to you tonight
 Just once, tie me up in your black hair; Step slowly
 [Even] if I am killed right away – I will be happy with my life
 Plunge a sharp dagger into Na‘im’s carcass; Step slowly.⁴²

This sort of poem is fairly well-attested in the types of flirtatious *ghazals* performed in the men’s lodges (*hujras*) that were maintained as part of the patronage structure of local notables, and which were the primary setting for most formal rural poetry in the mid twentieth century.

It is instructive to contrast the poetry of the *malik* with that of a much more marginal figure from his same district, and from the same *tazkira*. Talib Muhammad Rasul was a casual office servant in the Shewa elementary school who failed to make ends meet, eventually moved to a shrine, and took up the life of a *malang* (a local beggar and ascetic), dying at a young age for unclear reasons.⁴³ He composed songs in the *hujra-ghazal* vein like Muhammad Na‘im, but in his work and that of many other *talib* or *malang* poets that I have seen, there is none of the masculinized competitiveness and playful digs at honor present in Na‘im’s work. Honor was a luxury commodity; perhaps only elites were comfortable playing with other people’s honor in poetry as well as in life? In the work of Talib Muhammad Rasul, like Muhammad Na‘im, romantic obsessive devotion is described as *malang*-hood. Unlike in Muhammad Na‘im’s poems, the concept of actually uniting with the beloved is absent for the austere Talib Muhammad Rasul; and while Na‘im used the trope, he did not take up devotee-hood either as a poet-persona or in real life. Thus, in a different poem, Muhammad Na‘im says:

I am a *malang* for your love – Please find out about my state!
 I beg that you bestow your patronage [*qalang*] – I stand before you pleading
 Come join with me on my bed – Just stop with all the fuss from now on!⁴⁴

Meanwhile, Talib Muhammad Rasul sings:

Your firelight bangs, girl – Are scattered across your forehead
 They have sacrificed me [*sati kram*] – On the [funerary] pyre of love
 They have heaped – Piles of grief upon me,
 Your Muhammad Rasul, – Black of color.⁴⁵

In the poetics of *malang*-hood by actual *malangs* like Talib Muhammad Rasul, there is often a very distinct sense of self-abnegation, even an extinguishing of the individual ego, while inhabiting a persona combining sincerity with abjection. Indeed, other preserved examples of Talib Muhammad Rasul’s poetry

speak simultaneously of obsessive devotion and alienation as transcendent morality, in directly religious terms:

O Prophet, radiance emanates from your face! [...]
 I have been made a mad devotee out of love for you [...]
 I shall never have the good fortune to befriend you
 [But] if anyone should ask me on Judgment Day
 If I leave the world today or tomorrow
 [I can say] Muhammad Rasul spoke of you a few nights.⁴⁶

How might one negotiate the literary/symbolic and real aspects of *malang*-hood when interpreting this sort of lyric poetry? The philosopher Sayyid Baha al-Din Majrouh argued that the *malang* is a real social actor, but he is also largely a discursive construct enabling an avoidance of what Majrouh deems to be the oppressive constructions of masculine competitive honor in “eastern” Afghan “tribal” society.⁴⁷ Majrouh argues that this discursive persona functions rather like what Deleuze and Guattari described as “lines of flight”, ways out of the “striated” vertical space of hierarchal social ideologies.⁴⁸ Yet the significance of that discursive line of flight apparently differed for elite poets and marginal poets. The latter had a very real-life stake in this line of flight, outside the quest for transgressive poetic pleasure. And it shows, in at least some of their poetry.

The *malang*, simultaneously powerless and socially aloof, and thus immune to the ideological effects of social power: Muhammad Amin, in his poet-name ‘Malang Jan’, built on this very character-persona as a discursive weapon of the weak. In his most explicitly politicized work, this poet-persona spoke from the moral authority of the hermit’s austerity, and addressed itself reproachfully to elites. At the same time, this *malang* poet-persona publicly articulated a subaltern mass – the powerless ‘nobody’ as the angry voice of ‘everyman’. This conscious articulation of a rural public is a point to which the essay returns. First, it is important to ground the discussion of discourse in still more social context than has been provided above.

B. Context: *Malangi and Talibi as Social Strategy*

These lines of flight were not necessarily just in the realm of speech, but were also institutional. We don’t have very fine-grained descriptions of the daily life of *malangs* as non-elite (or even anti-elite) intellectuals. We do have more information on similar actors, though.

Like the persona of the *malang*, poets appear to have used the persona of ‘*talib*’, or young itinerant religious student, as a line of flight. Both the literary historian Zikriya Mlatar and the activist writer Ajmal Khattak write about *talib* poets in this period, in their social context.⁴⁹ Through their social practice of itinerancy and support from grassroots alms, it seems that were able to write poetry of extreme impropriety, focusing on the primacy of passion as morality. More than that, *taliban* poets were able to actively lampoon *specific* local elites from a position of self-deprecating non-dominance, and were often known as wicked satirists.

In the case of itinerant poets attached to religious networks, there is an institutional line of flight backing up a discursive one. Most poets as local

intellectuals were specifically attached, even if loosely, to the men's lodges of particular local notables as their base for performance; and poetic performances were patronized by local elites.⁵⁰ Weekly markets and occasional fairs had at times also provided an alternative forum, as had the independent village-shop networks of Pashto-speaking Sikh merchants; but it seems that these phenomena gradually died out from the 1920s to the 1940s at the expense of rising market towns, leaving *hujras* as the primary locus for most formalized rural poetry.⁵¹ *Taliban* (like some other groups such as herbalists or itinerant entertainer castes) were a special and different case. As Ajmal Khattak's memoirs describe it, local landed elites were frequently unable to co-opt or block critical poetry when performed by trans-local *taliban*. If local *maliks* refused to allow *talib* parties a public forum on the *taliban*'s own terms, they could rest assured that their stinginess would become *talib* lore, defaming their lack of beneficent manhood throughout the countryside.

This personalized attack on specific powerful people, rather than 'powerful people' as an abstract category, would not be the case with the more ordinary sort of village poets tied to landed power. For them, social criticism seems to have been oblique and metaphorical, taking lyrical form. Of course, the two types of poets did listen to each other, and could not be stopped from informing each other's work.⁵² Important as that point is, it is also important to note another thing. *Taliban* had institutional links to a horizontal, even if highly marginal, network outside the geographical purview of local power; and those links protected them from the control of 'mere' locality. Both Mlatar and Khattak describe their freedom with a great deal of romanticism, at the same time they describe their abject poverty.

IV. From Malangi Lyric to Subaltern Political Science: Addressing Publics as Power

This trans-local scale is key to understanding the nature of 1940s and 1950s rural activism in eastern Afghanistan and the broad-based changes in social awareness evident in Malang Jan's critical poems. Above all, reading the *transformation* in poetic genre, the rise of new genres, tells us quite a lot about shifting power relations in society, even more than the details in any one poem might reflect social conditions as perceived and argued by the poet. Saying new things in new ways can indicate new possibilities, new routes of channeling discourse through society, new tactics of discipline upon discourse. To put it another way, where you say something, who you say it to, how far you can expect it to reach – all these affect what you end up saying, even if (as Curley points out in his masterful introduction to *Poetry and History*) they may not entirely determine it.⁵³

Initially, the localized nature of poetry performance, excepting certain cases noted above, provided strong incentives for non-elites to self-censor, and to couch class critique in very personally intimate metaphors such as lyricism. Given the above, how would we explain the appearance in the late 1940s and 1950s of subaltern critical genres that dealt with systemic issues of political economy? Here again, translocalization of subaltern poetry was the key to how it became transformed. In the best-documented case, Malang Jan's, the poet found

yet another line of flight outside rural patronage and control structures, building on translocal networks forged by dominated portions of local elites.

A. *Reformist Elites and Public Consciousness*

Religious scholarly networks in eastern Afghanistan, based in lower gentry who were squeezed by more favored individuals and lineages, had always been linked to those in the NWFP. Those networks in turn interfaced with urban print reformism in Pashto and Urdu. In the NWFP, this class critique interfaced with peasant movements through the orally-performed Pashto literature of the lower rural gentry. This formed a sort of interlocking lattice of rural publics outside of colonial control, piecemeal though it may have been.⁵⁴

Here I rely on the work of Michael Warner in his concept of multiple “publics” in any given society.⁵⁵ This is akin to Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined community,” except that a public is defined by participation in the recirculation of ideas.⁵⁶ An identification with, and recirculation of, performative address is key: addressing a group of unrelated people under a collective title actually helps to *create* an awareness of collectivity. Each time this group is addressed anew, it reaffirms the line drawn around this category. For example, the cumulative effect of addressing a population by various lineage names, or as subjects to the crown, reinforces consciousness of difference—a very different social consciousness than would be reinforced by addressing all such gatherings as ‘my fellow Pashtuns’, for example; or ‘we, the Pashtun masses’, or simply ‘the people’, all of which categories are predominant in most subaltern ‘political science’ poetry. It assumes very different social relationships; and the act of using that category also helps create those relationships, especially when people relate to those categories and begin thinking and using those categories themselves. Relationships are, after all, no more and no less real than we believe them to be.

Class dimensions of anti-colonial critique in the NWFP related well in monarchic Eastern Afghanistan; and there is evidence that frequently-traveling scholars from Afghanistan’s lower gentry attempted to create the same public consciousness in Afghanistan that mass mobilization in NWFP relied upon. Or to put it another way, this composite print and oral ‘latticework’ of publics was beginning to extend throughout eastern Afghanistan as well as the NWFP, fostering more cross-tribal, anti-patriarchal, horizontal consciousness. Despite attempts by the Afghan Interior Ministry to territorially root sociopolitical frames of reference in localized and hierarchical structures of kinship and patronage ties to the monarchy, by the late 1930s we see something different. We see a grassroots liberalism that stemmed from the disjuncture, very real for mobile scholars, between local patriarchal *states* and a trans-regional Pashtun *society* that transcended borders.⁵⁷ Speaking to this trans-state ‘society’, rather than verticalized, localized social segments co-opted by states, was a political act. The 1940s saw numerous political-economic upheavals, amidst which many eastern Pashtun scholars of the lower gentry—including some introduced above, like Khadim and Khidmatgar—found their way into the center of state-sponsored cultural circles in Afghanistan.⁵⁸ From there they attempted to launch political movements, to stitch together a sense of a grassroots *mass* public through outreach aimed at a growing landless class that was already alienated from vertical

forms of rule. In doing so, they hoped to leverage public opinion in such a way that the royal family would have no choice but to adopt a constitutionally limited form of monarchy.

B. Alliances Between Cosmopolitan and Local Intellectuals

The *Wex Zalmaiyan* movement was the chief exemplar of this sort of cultural-political activity in the east. ‘Abd Allah Bakhtanai Khidmatgar informed me that, as an outreach director for the *Zalmaiyan*, he focused his activism in two areas of public discourse that were not fully controlled by the state: religious sermons, and subaltern poetry.⁵⁹ Writing and print, in both Pashto and Persian, had long been a jealously-guarded technology of power in Afghanistan; but perhaps the strategies of orality that non-elites developed outside the court could be adapted to be at least as powerful, considering the size of the rural population in aggregation. That is, the movement built up networks of local intellectuals in contact with local populations through whom they could get out their message, circumventing state media by stitching together what might be called informal or small media. In some cases, reformist intellectuals anonymously composed folk-style poetry to be recited by musicians.⁶⁰ In other cases, it was simply an institutional change—the growth of new public forums—that brought changes in discourse. Malang Jan is a fine example of the latter trend.

Using their translocal position in state machinery, *Wex Zalmai* activists such as Qiyam al-Din Khadim, ‘Abd Allah Bakhtanai Khidmatgar, ‘Abd al-Ra’uf Qatil Khugiyana, and others were able to provide forums for subaltern poets like Malang Jan in the new public events they were charged with arranging. These included Independence Day celebrations, opening ceremonies for public works projects, and other such ostensibly ‘state’ events. And the scale of such events was quite different. The events transcended locality and moved up to the district or provincial level; regional and national concerns were of greatest saliency. This seems to have had an enabling effect on formerly local poets. Speaking on a larger scale—a larger body of addressees—allowed them to go over the heads of *local* power and form explicit critiques; while correspondingly these were structural rather than individualized critiques in most cases. This critical impulse was both reinforced and channeled, it seems, by poets’ new, close relationships to those same reformists. Much ‘middle class’ developmentalist ideology shows up in much of Malang Jan’s explicit-critical work, though it never fully effaces the deep discourse of subaltern alienation, anomie, and powerlessness that so strongly characterized his, and others’, *malang* lyrics. Indeed, in the closing lines of the poem presented above, Malang Jan abstracts this alienation beyond his individual experience onto that of all the rural underclass: “I am the beggar on every doorstep in every hamlet—If only this world’s bazaar didn’t mix things up so!”

At the same time as they managed state events, cosmopolitan reformists used their trans-regional connections to ensure that the ‘right’ poets and musicians gained a great deal of exposure, traveling further than musicians had earlier. They were invited to weddings and other such quasi-public events across the Pashtun region. Songs enjoyed subsequent recirculation in quotidian settings by other, usually amateur, listeners; and this carried new forms of public consciousness yet further. The result was a mutually-reinforcing cycle. Poetry like

Malang Jan's later political science evolved along with a form of mass media spread entirely by word of mouth; which coincided with the eruption of a cross-tribal—even, sometimes, anti-tribal—mass consciousness in eastern Afghanistan. By the early 1950s, Malang Jan's poetry was being performed as far afield as Peshawar, carried not by Kabul's nationalist radio as would be the case later, but by nomads and apprentice musicians of Malang Jan's.⁶¹

Landed elites presiding over both semi-public and state events tried to inscribe traditional forms of patronage over poetic discourse in larger public events, even at the provincial-level state events. Attempting to force poets and musicians to accept submissive fealty, through acceptance of honors in the same way they would on a village scale, was a way for elites to reestablish a personalized dominance over a critical poet-persona, and thus over criticism itself. However, activists like Khidmatgar were able to intervene in such events, successfully reframing the terms of the performance. The poet's right to speak, they said, came not from the largesse of the patron but from the popularity of poetic discourse among a relatively new social category: the *ulās*, or mass, in abstract as a locus for 'public opinion'.⁶² Crucially, they claimed this in full view of the audience; simultaneously relying upon and enacting new construals of the audience and the poet as representatives of a 'rural mass'. Both subaltern poet and urbane cultural activist found common cause to rely on the collective potential strength of this mass—to protect themselves against retribution for political activism and to extend the social domain of their critiques. These benefits outweighed the rhetorical-ideological compromises that both sets of intellectuals regularly made: in such settings, the systemic analysis of elite reformists was melded with subaltern discourses focusing on intimate local relations of dominance and submission. A manifest result of this alliance was a new genre, subaltern political science.

Both sensibilities—of 'massification', and of marginalized grievance—came to weight the word *ulās* in such works. Far from its old Mongol administrative gloss as 'tribe' or '[a specific] administered population' (a sense that it retains in the Afghan administrative unit '*wālās-walāy*'), the word in modern Pashto might often best be glossed as "the common people" (in this more recent sense it appears in the 1964 name of the lower house of national parliament, the *wālasi jārğa*). This semantic transformation of a word, from 'people of a [specifiable] unit' to 'common people', or simply '*the people*', seems to have occurred at the same time as the public transformations described here; and I explicitly make the claim that this is not a random correlation but rather a direct result of this 1940s and 1950s political activism. It reshaped public consciousness forever, even after the actual activist movement was crushed by arrests and purges under the absolutist new Prime Minister Da'ud Khan, when he took over in a royal family-internal power grab in 1953. Malang Jan too, once Da'ud took power, was brought to Kabul and co-opted. In fact, Malang Jan's angry expressions of alienation, and a notable ambivalence in his work to the depersonalizing potential of liberal development as much as monarchic paternalism, actually helped Da'ud ideologically outmaneuver his reformist rivals. Malang Jan became an ally of Da'ud's centralizing state (apparently a reluctant one, if we believe the anecdotes). His new poems linked state and mass directly, cutting out reformist middlemen, through co-option of subaltern discontent into a Pashtun nationalism that was relatively uncritical—at least domestically.

Malang Jan was given a modest stipend and a house in the courtyard of the government's Independent Directorate for Tribal Affairs, and was placed in charge of a daily half-hour radio program of musical irredentist propaganda directed against the new state of Pakistan—a state which was busy consolidating power by force in its own Pashtun regions, across a border that Kabul did not recognize.⁶³ Still, the fact that Da'ud had to co-opt Malang Jan rather than neutralize him is a testament to the sticking power of this sort of activism—that is, activism that aims at reshaping the contours of the public sphere itself—even after activist cadres are eliminated.

V. Conclusion

We are fortunate that in the case of the Pashtun regions of Afghanistan, we have a storehouse not only of primary discourse from the margins of society, filtered though it may be through several levels of editing; we also have a good deal of biographical context alongside it. This allows for a highly agent-centric sort of history writing, one which gives us a range of insights. First, in the case of those like Malang Jan for whom we have especially good amounts of information, we see how actors on all levels, rural and urban, negotiated power, avoiding potential suggestions that any one sector was more dynamic or more static. Keeping close attention on individual actors' stakes allows us to move beyond simple binaries of dominant and dominated, while still centering inequality in a discussion of cultural production and social change. Second, by forcing us to think about the interplay of biographical individual and contextual speaking persona, *tazkira* poems prompt us to explore ranges of political language that we might otherwise overlook, or might narrowly and hastily consign to domains such as 'romantic' with the implication that such domains have no value in political analysis.

Also in Malang Jan's case, the highly visible nature of the links between geographical scale of address; horizontal alliances and cross-class links; and genre shifts lead us in even more interesting directions. The primarily oral nature of the publics through which Pashtun mass consciousness was created undermines the centrality of Benedict Anderson's "print capitalism" in discussions of nationalism, for example.⁶⁴ Here we have a true mass medium of communication that was mediated primarily by face-to-face contact; which incidentally also undermines any potential reading of rural Afghan societies as 'inward-looking' or 'closed'.⁶⁵

Finally, the great importance of semi-private and semi-public spaces like weddings allows us to further broaden the scope of what we might consider 'public' in the first place. Further, most discussions of publics, from Habermas to Warner, have tended to assume that debates within publics might be sharply political, but the publics themselves are created primarily passively, organically, as a result of some other, more fundamental type of social change.⁶⁶ In the case here, by contrast, it is very clear that publics can be, indeed were, channeled and contoured by actors in a very deliberate fashion for specific political goals.

The dynamic interplay of translocality, ideology, and public forum returns our attention to the original question at the heart of this paper—how can we use this body of (originally) oral literature as source material for social history? We find in conclusion that the argument for a dynamic reading of context and

discourse can be taken even further than David Curley's. We must direct our attention not only to the immediate performative context but to the shape of publics in formation—to the audiences that these poems created, as well as presumed. Each iteration in poetic format, each subsequent appeal to a 'mass public', each re-performance by local musicians and amateur singers at far-flung village events, solidified the awareness of the very publics they addressed and made those publics more and more real. In reading oral poetry like this over time, especially in the body of a single poet's work such as Malang Jan, we are not simply reading a transparent document attesting to an anti-tribal, mass consciousness. A fully-informed reading must preserve the directed address—the text's implied audiences, and the audiences that that address sought to create. If we are properly informed as to the broad regional context of public sphere formation, our reading should relive the performative processes through which that consciousness was created. These documents may reach us transcribed in sterile black and white. But if we read them carefully enough, we can remind ourselves that they were originally potent weapons of the weak, ones which transcended the dichotomies of orality and print; and that their *tazkira* transcription too was—in part—an extension of their power.

Endnotes

1. For urban areas, of course, there are more ample Afghan publications; and conclusions about certain rural regions can indirectly be drawn from these as well.
2. Malang Jan, "Nən me bya zargəy narai narai khugegi," 99-104 in Malang Jan, *Da Malang Jan Khwage Naghme* (Oxford, 1998).
3. Capt. J. A. Robinson, *Notes on Nomad Tribes of Eastern Afghanistan* (Quetta, 1978 [1934]), 27, discusses how former nomads defaulted *en masse* on loans taken from Indian bankers, and reinvested in land within Afghanistan, due to shifts in the world economy during the Great Depression. 1930s and 1940s issues of the *Da Kabul Kalanai* almanac and *Iqtisad* magazine provide suggestive evidence and vague statistics pointing to regional class shifts, which back up general details in M. G. M. Ghobar, *Afghanistan in the Course of History* vol. 2, trans. Sherief Fayeze (Alexandria, VA: 2001). An unpublished 1976 Kabul University thesis entitled *Da Nangrahar Xarwali Tashkilat*, supervised by M. Bashir Wahhabzada, provides collated information charting urban growth in Jalalabad, which seems correlated to economically-impelled outmigration from the surrounding hinterlands. Unfortunately my copied extracts of this thesis do not contain the title page, while the name of that thesis's author is illegible in my copy of the University's handwritten thesis catalog.
4. For some impressionistic details on lower class rural itinerancy, see Mahmoud Habibi, *Evolution économique et sociale des populations de l'Afghanistan à l'époque contemporaine*, (PhD Diss., University of Paris, School of Letters and Human Sciences, 1959), especially 193.
5. The biographical information presented here comes from 'Abd al-Wajid Wajid, *Da Malang Jan pa Ash'aro ke da Azadi aw Hewad Paləne Angaza* (Kabul, 2004), especially 5-10.
6. The credit monopolies come through in a number of Malang Jan's passing comments about corrupt accountants. For a nearly contemporary urban elite literary view echoing the disjuncture between elite trade and local political economy in early twentieth

century Afghanistan, but in a more approving tone, refer to Mawlawi Salih Muhammad's poem entitled "Work in Society", reprinted in 'Abd al-Hayy Habibi, ed., *Da Paxto Masnawi* (Kabul, 1972).

7. Malang Jan, "Nən me bya . . .," 100-101. This and all subsequent translations are mine. The italicized text here indicates interwoven portions of the *sar*, what I refer to as the "thesis" quatrain, which functions as a refrain summing up the arguments of the various stanzas.

8. I paraphrase the title of Peter Gran, *The Rise of the Rich: a New View of Modern World History* (Ithaca, 2008).

9. Malang Jan, "Nən me bya . . .," 99.

10. Refer to Julia Adams, "The Rule of the Father: Patriarchy and Patrimonialism in Early Modern Europe," 237-266 in Max Weber's 'Economy and Society': a Critical Companion, ed. Camic, Gorski and Trubek (Palo Alto, 2005).

11. Malang Jan, "Nən me bya . . .," Camic, Gorski and Trubek, eds. 102-103.

12. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 271-313 in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Nelson and Grossberger (London, 1998).

13. The titles given as examples are Muhammad Wali Zalmi, *Da Kandahar Mashahir: Sufiyan*, 'Arifan, *Mazarat* (Kabul, 1970); and 'Abd al-Ra'uf Benawa, comp. and ed., *Da Afghanistan Numiyali* (Kabul, 1974).

14. See 'Abd al-Ra'uf Benawa, comp. and ed., *Osəni Likwal vol.1* (Kabul, 1961), 'A. R. Benawa, comp. and ed., *Kabul, Da Paxto Toləna*.

15. David Edwards considers this to be part and parcel of "tribalism" as does Fredrik Barth. Talal Asad and Akbar S. Ahmed think that it is a feature of elites in Pashtun societies that are characterized by what Ahmed describes as a "feudal" structure. See David Edwards, *Heroes of the Age* (Berkeley, 1996); F. Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (London, 1959); Talal Asad, "Market Model, Class Structure and Consent"; *Man* (New Series) 7:1 (1972): 74-94; Akbar. S. Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Culture* (London, 1980). I contend that a hegemonic privileging of the patriarchal individual not only had extra-local ramifications in most places, but was usually a linchpin of monarchic (or other) state rule, not opposed to it as Edwards, *Heroes of the Age*, has it. See James Caron, *Cultural Histories of Pashtun Nationalism* (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2009) for the extended argument; see Sayyid Baha al-Din Majruh, *Da Zanzani Xamar* (Kabul, 1978) for a literary dramatization of it.

16. Interestingly, in a 1948 article series, the Minister of National Economy 'Abd al-Majid Zabuli laments a deep reluctance of Afghan bureaucrats and the press to engage in systematic social analysis (which contributed, in his estimation, to the country's economic woes in the late 1940s). More, the primary reason he gives for this is a political system that privileges the individual and zero-sum competition. See 'Abd al-Majid Zabuli, *Mushkilat-i Iqtisadi-yi Ma wa Mujadila ba Anha* (Kabul, 1949), especially 2-3.

17. A structural critique of political-economic power relations, on the national and transnational scale, was first leveled in print by the Persian-speaking Kabuli historian M. G. M. Ghobar, in a 1946 article series in the state paper *Is'lah*. Intellectuals appear to have been unsure how open they could be under the new Prime Minister Shah Mahmud, who was relatively more open than his repressive brother Muhammad Hashim. Ghobar's article series went over whatever implicit line there was. Entitled "Iqtisad-i Ma (Our Economy)," the series resulted in the sacking of *Is'lah*'s editor.

18. Examples of reformist writers who either wrote small entries about oral poets in newspapers, or edited *tazkiras*, or both, are numerous over the course of the twentieth century;

for the period in question here, the leading pioneer was probably 'Abd al-Rauf Benawa. 'Abd al-Hayy Habibi also edited a few very influential early *tazkiras*, and established a long-lasting valuation in Pashto cultural studies that privileged rural "pristine" genius over the "tainted" sensibilities of urban civilization. Part of this was due to an anti-monarchist and constitutionalist impulse, but labeling Habibi fully a "reformist" in the manner of Benawa or Khadim might be a stretch.

19. Nancy Dupree, "The Conscription of Afghan Writers: an Aborted Experiment in Socialist Realism," *Central Asian Survey* 4:4 (1985): 69-87, esp. 76-80.

20. Benawa, in *Angar*, February 1, 1330 [1951], quoted in Gankovsky *et al.* (1985), *A History of Afghanistan* (Moscow, 1985), 239-240.

21. Quoted by Fazl-i Rahim Marwat in "The Impact of the Wikh Zalmyan Movement on Afghan Politics," *Central Asia [Peshawar]* 36:2 (1995): 45.

22. For a relatively recent printing see Muhammad Gul Nuri, *Milli Hindara* (with new commentary by M. I. H. 'Umarzai) (Peshawar, 2001).

23. A. H. Habibi, edition with commentary of Muhammad b. Daud b. Qader Khan Horak, *The Hidden Treasure: Pata Khazana*, Eng. trans. Khushal Habibi (Lanham, MD, 1997).

24. James Darmesteter, *Chants populaires des Afghans* (Paris, 1888); Asad Allah Shu'ur, *Mufahama-yi Shifahi wa Sayr-i Tarikhi An dar Afghanistan* (Kabul, 1988).

25. David Curley, *Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-Kabya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal* (San Francisco, 2008).

26. Qiyam al-Din Khadim. "Da Shi'r Gharz aw Ghaya," 18-22 in *Shi'r aw Adab*, ed. 'A. B. 'Khidmatgar' (Kabul, 1954).

27. David Edwards, "Words in the Balance: The Poetics of Political Dissent in Afghanistan," 114-129 in *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross Cultural Analysis*, ed. Dale Eickelman (Bloomington, 1993).

28. In discriminating here between "formal" and "informal" poetry, I refer to a differentiation that is emic to Pashto-language folklore and popular culture studies. Some genres ("informal") were performed extemporaneously and casually in daily life; and others ("formal") were performed in a conscious way that made some separation between audience and performer. This essay deals with the latter; and only in the case of the latter has the poet's putative identity usually been preserved. This ability to attribute an individual author is, indeed, one of the key emic characteristics of "formal" poetry.

29. See, most directly, Steven Caton, "Power, Persuasion and Language: a Critique of the Segmentary Model in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19:1 (1987): 77-101.

30. Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: the case of Sayyid Mahammad Abdille Hasan* (Cambridge, 1982).

31. W. Flagg Miller (2005), "Of Songs and Signs: Audiocassette Poetry, Moral Character, and the Culture of Circulation in Yemen," *American Ethnologist* 32:1 (2005): 82-99; also Miller, "Metaphors of Commerce: Trans-valuing Tribalism in Yemeni Audiocassette Poetry," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002): 29-57.

32. The most interesting exceptions are the anonymous smaller and more casual genres of folk poetry, which unfortunately are very difficult to contextualize. Foremost is a genre usually called "women's" poetry, the *landey*. See S. B. Majrouh, *Songs of Love and War*, trans. M. de Jager (New York, 2003), for an English treatment. Sulayman La'iq, *Paxto*

Landay (Kabul, 1984), employing a Marxian framework, is still the most rigorous discussion; though the genre is almost exactly identical in form and social use to the Egyptian Bedouin *ghinnawa* discussed in Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley, 1999). Although La'iq's historical analysis is probably as good as can be possible given the sources he worked with, his methodology resembles Darmesteter's in that the *landey* appears as a transparent expression of class and gender dynamics, and his discussion lacks the far more sensitive, dynamic character of Abu-Lughod's.

33. Q. Khadim, "Da Shi'r Gharz ...": 20-21.

34. 'Abd Allah Bakhtanai 'Khidmatgar', *Zə, Malang Jan aw Khwage Naghme* (Peshawar, 2004): 25.

35. Malang Jan, "Ma Zharəḷ," 390 in Malang Jan, *Da Malang Jan Khwage Naghme* (Oxford, 1998).

36. See Jon W. Anderson, "There are no Khans Anymore: Economic Development and Social Change in Tribal Afghanistan," *Middle East Journal* 32:2 (1978): 167-183. In raising this possibility, I also draw upon Ramachandra Guha's discussion on class critiques in the princely state of Garhwal, which draws inspiration in turn from E. P. Thompson. See Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Berkeley, 1989), especially Chapter Four.

37. 'Khidmatgar', personal interview, Peshawar, Pakistan, May 1, 2007

38. For this use of the word *qalang*, which also means "taxation" in Pashto, see Ajmal Khattak, *Qissa Zma da Adabi Zhwand, Awala Hissa* (Charsadda, 2005), 50.

39. I use the phrase "weapons of the weak" in echo of the title of James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985).

40. See Jon W. Anderson, "Sentimental Ambivalence and the Exegesis of "Self" in Afghanistan," *Anthropological Quarterly* 58:4 (1985): 203-211.

41. See the biographical directory *Paxtanə Shu'ara vol. 4.*, 'Khidmatgar', ed., (Kabul, n/d), 229.

42. *Paxtanə Shu'ara vol. 4*, 230.

43. Muhammad 'Arif Tasal published information about this poet, whose poems were recited by the singers of his part of Nangrahar, in *Zerai* magazine in 1974. That feature was then reproduced in Khidmatgar's edition of *Paxtanə Shu'ara vol. 4*. This information comes from that source, 348-349.

44. *Paxtanə Shu'ara vol. 4*, 232.

45. *Paxtanə Shu'ara vol. 4*, 350-351.

46. *Paxtanə Shu'ara vol. 4*, 349-350.

47. Refer to Sayyid Baha al-Din Majrouh, "Some Vestiges of Buddhist World-Outlook in our Collective Unconscious," *Afghanistan* 30:1 (1977): 89-96.

48. Refer to Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York, 1980), particularly 9-10, for their concept "lines of flight".

49. For details, see Zikriya Mlatar, *Taliban aw Paxto Adab* (Peshawar, 1986), esp. pp. jim - he; A. Khattak, *Qissa Zma ...*, 103-105.

50. Refer to A. Khattak, *Qissa Zma ...*, 50-51 and *passim*. The above characterization, of a certain degree of self-censorship, was also confirmed to me for Afghanistan's case in

personal conversations with Habib Allah Rafi' and Khidmatgar in April and May of 2007 (in Kabul and Peshawar). It is also alluded to in a discussion of popular poetry, especially women's, in the *tazkira Bidiyani Guluna* (n.a.) (Kabul, 1983). The characterization does not apply to casually-performed genres such as *landay*, which are interesting and complex enough that they must be discussed separately.

51. For fairs and markets, I rely on the word of Khidmatgar, in personal conversation, May 1, 2007, Peshawar, who must be considered an extremely reliable eyewitness to such events. Khidmatgar was professionally concerned with popular poets during this time, and was a major organizer of official fairs in the 1960s specifically as a way to address the loss of this public forum (and weekly markets) due to the growth of district market towns and improved transportation infrastructure. For a mention of Sikh merchant networks as nodes of poetic production before 1930, see *Bidiyani Guluna*, 22. The majority of these merchants were pushed out by indigenous capital monopolies during the reign of Aman Allah (1919-1929) and subsequently.

52. Did the dialectics of abstraction and specificity – the interplay between lyrical, metaphorical representations of abstract class in localized poets, and personalized satire in the case of poets outside village institutional control – contribute to subaltern framings of local struggle in a wider abstract way, as class? Possibly, though we lack sufficient sources on old, contingently performed *taliban* poetry to say so conclusively.

53. Curley, *Poetry and History*, 26-27.

54. Here I draw upon the arguments in Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-1922," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. R. Guha and G. Chakravorty Spivak (New York, 1988).

55. See Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002): 49-90.

56. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1991).

57. I draw out this argument in Caron, *Cultural Histories of Pashtun Nationalism*, Chapter Four.

58. Among these upheavals were: economic chaos brought by World War 2; challenges posed to the monarchy by republicans like 'Abd al-Majid Zabuli and Da'ud Khan (and the underground political organizations they interacted with); and liberalization experiments under Shah Mahmud culminating in the activist Seventh Parliament.

59. 'Khidmatgar', personal interview, Peshawar, Pakistan, May 1, 2007.

60. See Mustafa Jihad, ed., *Da Gulo Zolay vol. 1* (Kabul: 1989); also, 'Khidmatgar', personal interview, Peshawar, Pakistan, May 1, 2007.

61. Mumtaz Nasir, formerly of Lok Virsa (Pakistan's Folk Heritage Institute), in personal communication regarding Malang Jan's apprentice 'Abd al-Rahman 'Or'.

62. 'Khidmatgar' (Zə, *Malang Jan aw Khwage Naghme*) recounts one such occurrence in detail on 85-88.

63. Wajid, "Da Malang Jan pa Ash'aro ke ...", 7; 17-18.

64. Refer to B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, for "print capitalism."

65. Even very careful scholars seem often to have assumed this; see for example Barnett Rubin, "Lineages of the State in Afghanistan," *Asian Survey* 28 (1988): 1200.

66. See Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. T. Burger, trans (Cambridge, MA, 1991); and M. Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics."